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ABSTRACT

The typical route to certification for beginning foreign language teachers requires the candidate to complete an approved program of teacher education in a four-year institution, have a certain minimum grade point average, and have completed a specified number of foreign language credit hours. Notable trends in foreign language teacher certification include increased teacher competency assessment, reappraisal of teacher preparation programs and certification procedures, and increased use of proficiency standards for evaluating teachers. Critical issues in foreign language teacher certification include a greater demand for teachers with higher proficiency levels and more technical competence in teaching, the need to identify competencies necessary for successful teaching, and exploration of the relationship between test scores and teacher effectiveness. Other changes in teacher certification that would be beneficial for foreign language instruction include increased undergraduate language major requirements, requirement of a variety of supervised clinical experiences, certification based on observed classroom performance as well as written and oral tests, and periodic mandatory recertification. (MSE)

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ERIC DIGEST

ERIC Clearinghouse on
Languages and Linguistics

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Prepared by Barbara H. Wing
September 1984

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Foreign Language Teacher Certification

Prepared by Barbara H. Wing

September 1984

Foreign Language Teacher Certification at Present

The typical route to certification for beginning foreign language (FL) teachers in the United States requires the candidate to complete an "approved program" of teacher education in a four-year college or university, to have a certain minimum grade point average, and to have completed a specified number of credit hours in the foreign language.

To receive "approved program" status, institutions must demonstrate to their state department of education that they are fulfilling state standards. Most states model their standards after two statements developed by the FL teaching profession in the 1950s and '60s titled, *Qualifications for Secondary School Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages* and *Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages* (both in Paquette, 1966). The *Qualifications* are brief descriptions of "minimal," "good," and "superior" competence in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, applied linguistics, culture and civilization, and pedagogy. The *Guidelines* describe model programs, using the *Qualifications* as minimum objectives (Wing, 1984).

New Trends in FL Teacher Certification

Three developments in education in general and foreign language education in particular should be noted.

1. *Teacher Competency Assessment*. Presently, some teacher candidates in 36 states are tested using standardized examinations in basic skills, professional knowledge, and subject matter content. Sometimes such testing is also one component of competency-based teacher education (CBTE), which assumes that specific competencies considered essential to successful teaching (a) can be identified through analysis of effective classroom teaching and (b) should be demonstrated before certification.

2. *Reappraisal of FL Teacher Certification*. FL educators are reviewing teacher preparation programs and certification procedures. As a result of the 1980 National Conference on Professional Priorities (Lange, 1983), a Task Force on Teacher Education, appointed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, is currently addressing the issues. Some states, including New Jersey and Wisconsin, have recently adopted new standards (endorsed by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification) for approved programs for FL teachers.

3. *FL Proficiency Evaluation*. In the early 1960s, the *MLA/ETS Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Students* were developed. Although generally outdated now, they represent the first large-scale standardized attempt to test the FL competence areas of the *Qualifications* statement. In spite of the existence of these tests, however, validation of competence in the foreign language typically has been a matter of successfully completing the FL major.

Since 1979, ACTFL and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have collaborated to define and assess language proficiency. One significant result has been the adaptation of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) oral interview test to academic situations, providing a common, widely known index of spoken language ability. Concurrently, the development of the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* ("ACTFL provisional," 1984) in speaking, listening comprehension, reading, writing, and culture has provided a working model for describing and assessing performance in each of these areas (Higgs, 1984).

An effort to develop teacher certification standards based on the ACTFL/ETS proficiency guidelines is in the pilot stage. Scheduled for completion in 1986, a project titled "Proficiency-Based Foreign Language Teacher Certification in Texas" will train foreign language faculty to test oral proficiency using the interview method. The faculty will use the interview to determine the level of oral proficiency of prospective foreign language teachers, and the project will then provide the State of Texas with recommendations for required proficiency levels, based on the interview testing results ("Texas to test," 1984). Similar studies will also be conducted at the University of Pennsylvania Model Regional Center for Language Proficiency ("ACTFL receives," 1983).

Ten states now require an examination in the foreign language. The National Teachers Examination, administered by ETS, is used in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Georgia and Oklahoma use tests developed by FL teachers in conjunction with National Evaluation Systems of Amherst, MA. North Carolina has asked statewide committees of university professors and public school teachers to compile lists of skills to be used later as a measure of competence. The State of Massachusetts administers tests in comprehension, writing, and speaking developed by the Massachusetts Language and Culture Assessor Center. In addition, oral proficiency is evaluated in the Georgia and Massachusetts tests. Connecticut and Texas have

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mandated testing teachers in their teaching field, while Kentucky and West Virginia will do so in the near future (Galloway, 1982; Johnson & LaBouve, 1984).

Critical Issues in FL Teacher Certification

1. *Increased Demand for FL Teaching*. As many of the recent reports on education in the United States have pointed out, a working knowledge of a foreign language has humanistic and pragmatic value for the individual as well as strategic value for our country. In an effort to improve elementary and secondary education, New York State, for example, is implementing a program that will require some study of foreign languages in grades K-9 and that will strengthen the secondary school sequence. Increased state aid will be awarded to schools whose students reach specified levels on a designated proficiency test. Such changes have implications for teacher certification. More FL teachers, with higher language proficiency levels and greater technical competence in teaching all grade levels, will be needed to meet these demands.

2. *Identification of Competencies Considered Necessary for Successful Teaching*. Foreign language teachers need two specialized types of competencies in addition to those required of all teachers: classroom target language competencies (what the teacher knows *about* the language and *how* the teacher uses the language in the classroom) and classroom foreign language teaching competencies (what the teacher *does* to promote student learning) (Wing, 1984). Progress on the identification of language competencies is being made through projects such as the previously mentioned Texas project and Pennsylvania model regional center. However, given the complexity of the language learning process, it is extremely difficult, yet critical, to determine what *teaching* competencies are essential.

3. *Relationship Between Test Scores and Teacher Effectiveness*. The validity of teacher competency assessment for certification purposes depends on the closeness of the relationship between teachers' performance on the tests and teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. Serious questions regarding the legality and possible discriminatory nature of current testing practices have been raised ("Competency Testing," 1984).

What Remains to Be Done in FL Teacher Certification

Proficiency testing holds promise for improving the assessment of language skills; however, before it is widely mandated, questions such as those being investigated in the Texas study must be answered. Research to identify essential classroom competencies is needed to address the questions of the validity and legality of test instruments. Other certification changes likely to improve FL teaching include:

1. increasing the undergraduate major requirements in foreign languages, including an immersion experience in the foreign country, but not at the expense of FL education courses;

2. requiring a variety of clinical experiences under the supervision of qualified university and secondary personnel;

3. certifying on the basis of observed classroom performance as well as written and oral tests; and

4. recertifying at periodic intervals to ensure that teachers keep their language and teaching skills current.

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